

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5216
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY

S E C R E T NOUAKCHOTT 0492

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP PFOR MR MO AG US (ROBINSON AND ATHERTON)
SUBJECT: MAURITANIA INFORMALLY EXPRESSES INTEREST IN HAVING
HIGH-LEVEL U.S. VISITOR

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 474

1. REGIME INTIMATE 'ABD AR-RAHMAAN OULD DADDAH (COUSIN OF PRESIDENT, CLOSE FRIEND AND CONFIDANT OF MINISTERS OF STATE SIDI 'ABDALLAHI AND OULD MOUKNASS) CAME TO EMBASSY NOON FEBRUARY 28 TO URGE USG TO ARRANGE QUICK VISIT TO NOUAKCHOTT BY NEA ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON AFTER HE CONCLUDES HIS VISITS TO ALGIERS AND RABAT. RECOGNIZING SCHEDULING COMPLICATIONS INVOLVED, 'ABD AR-RAHMAAN INSISTED TO AMBASSADOR THAT VISIT OF ONLY FEW HOURS WOULD BE EXTREMELY VALUABLE AND VERY MUCH APPRECIATED BY GIRM. HE REPORTED GOVERNMENT WAS PREPARED TO SEND PLANE TO DAKAR OR LAS PALMAS TO PICK UP ATHERTON IF THAT WOULD FACILITATE VISIT. EVEN VERY BRIEF VISIT WOULD PERMIT ATHERTON TO SPEND HOUR OR TWO WITH PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH. REMAINING TIME AVAILABLE WOULD PERMIT DISCUSSIONS WITH MINISTER STATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND OTHER SENIOR OFFICIALS. FOR FIRST TIME IN HIS CAREER AS INFORMAL CONTACT BETWEEN SENIOR LEVELS GIRM AND US MISSION, 'ABD AR-RAHMAAN EXPLICITLY DECLARED SATURDAY THAT HE WAS "SPEAKING FOR OTHERS" IN ADDITION TO HIMSELF. HIS LATER REFERENCE TO INFORMATION I HAVE PASSED TO MFA. ROBINSON AND ATHERTON VISITS IDENTIFIES,
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VIRTUALLY CONCLUSIVELY, ACTING MINISTER STATE FOREIGN

AFFAIRS SIDI 'ABDALLAHI AS ONE OF "OTHERS".

2. IN RESPONSE, I RESTATED CONTEXT AND GROUND RULES OF ATHERTON VISITS TO ALGIERS AND RABAT, UNDERSCORING FACT USG WAS NOT AND WOULD NOT UNDERTAKE MEDIATION ROLE AMONG SAHARA DISPUTANTS. POINTED OUT FIRMLY THAT VISIT BY ATHERTON TO NOUAKCHOTT AFTER STOPS IN ALGIERS AND RABAT WOULD "PROVE" US WAS EMBARKED ON PEACEMAKING EFFORT SO FAR AS OTHER GOVERNMENTS, NEWS MEDIA, AND PUBLIC WERE CONCERNED. DENIALS NO MATTER HOW VIGOROUS WOULD NOT BE BELIEVED; THEY WOULD BE INTERPRETED AS CONFIRMATION OF ASSERTED FACT. INESCAPABLE CONCLUSION THEREFORE WAS THAT ATHERTON VISIT TO NOUAKCHOTT AT THIS STAGE WAS NON-STARTER. I SUGGESTED TO 'ABD AR-RAHMAAN, HOWEVER, THAT VISIT BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SCHAUFLE OR BY UNDER SECRETARY ROBINSON OR BY ATHERTON AT SOME LATER TIME MIGHT CONCEIVABLY BE ARRANGED. VISIT BY ROBINSON AS MOST SENIOR ECONOMIC OFFICIAL IN DEPARTMENT MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE NOW, BUT I CAUTIONED 'ABD AR-RAHMAAN NOT TO GET HIS OR "OTHERS" HOPES UP SINCE UNDER SECRETARY'S SCHEDULE IS BLOCKED OUT IN DETAIL THREE MONTHS IN ADVANCE, AND SIMPLY CANNOT BE CHANGED AT LAST MINUTE HOWEVER DESIRABLE ANOTHER ACTIVITY MIGHT BE.

3. DURING COURSE OF WIDE-RANGING DISCUSSION WHICH FOLLOWED, 'ABD AR-RAHMAAN REHEARSED HIS NOW FAMILIAR LINE THAT TIME IS NOW FOR US TO STEP FORWARD INTO VACUUM CREATED BY DISINTEGRATION OF MAURITANIA'S FORMER TIES WITH ALGERIA AND OTHER THIRD WORLD MILITANTS IN AFRICA. I NOTED THAT US HAD REPEATEDLY REITERATED BY WORD AND DEED ITS WILLINGNESS TO BUILD BROADER AND DEEPER RELATIONSHIP WITH MAURITANIA, AND TICKED OFF STEPS WE HAD TAKEN IN PAST FEW WEEKS WHICH WERE EARNESTS OF OUR DESIRE: OMVS ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY GRANT, EX-IM LOAN FOR SUGAR REFINERY, ONGOING DISCUSSIONS OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND NEGOTIATIONS ON NEW UMBRELLA AGREEMENT, PLUS IN ALL PROBABILITY AFFIRMATIVE RESPONSE TO RECENT GIRM EMERGENCY FOOD REQUEST. SUGGESTED THAT BUILDING NEW RELATIONSHIP OF REAL UNDERSTANDING AND CLOSE COOPERATION TAKES TIME AND HARD WORK BY BOTH SIDES. WE BELIEVE WE ARE DOING OUR PART. IN COMPARISON,

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MEMORIES IN WASHINGTON BOTH IN STATE AND ON HILL ARE STILL PAINFULLY SHARP NOT ONLY OF POSITIONS GIRM TOOK ON GUAM, PUERTO RICO AND KOREA, BUT ALSO OF SPEECH MOUKNASS MADE IN GA GENERAL DEBATE. WHEN 'ABD AR-RAHMAAN TROTTED OUT TIRED OLD SMALL-COUNTRY ARGUMENT THAT US WAS GREAT POWER AND SHOULD OVERLOOK SUCH THINGS, I VIGOROUSLY REMINDED HIM WE WERE ALSO HUMAN AND HAD NUMBER, ALBEIT LIMITED, OF AREAS OF SPECIAL SENSITIVITY

WHICH OTHER NATIONS INCREASINGLY MUST RECOGNIZE AND ACCOMMODATE US ON IF THEY DESIRE OUR ALL-OUT COOPERATION. 'ABD AR-RAHMAAN RESPONDED THAT HE HAD PREVIOUSLY COUNSELED HIS FRIENDS IN GOVERNMENT NOT TO GET INVOLVED IN THIRD WORLD ISSUES WHICH ARE OF TRIGINAL INTEREST TO MAURITANIA OR TAKE USELESS PUBLIC POSITIONS ON THIRD WORLD CAUSES WHICH PRODUCE NO CONCRET DIUQVIDENDS FROM THIRD WORLDBERS AND ANNOY NATIONS WHICH HAVE MEANS TO HELP MAURITANIA. HE VOLUNTEERED HE PLANS TO RENEW HIS RECOMMENDATION THAT GIRM OFFICIALS LIMIT THEIR PRONOUNCEMENTS TO MATTERS WHICH DIRECTLY CONCERN MAURITANIA AND THEIR ACCTIONS TO STEPS WHICH CONTRIBUTE DIRECTLY TO ITS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT. HE ALSO REPORTED THAT HE HAD REPEATEDLY INSISTED TO HIS MINISTER-LEVEL FRIENDS THAT SERIES OF QUIET ACTIONS OVER PERIOD OF SEVERAL MONTHS WOULD PRODUCE MUCH MORE UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT THAN COUPLE OF WELL-PUBLICIZED SPEECHES. JUMPING TO REINFORCE THIS VIEW, I QUICKLY POINTED OUT THAT IN LESS THAN FIVE WEEKS AFTER GIRM SIGNED MIFERMA COMPENSATION AGREEMENT, SENIOR OFFICIAL OF ONE OF LARGEST BANKS IN NEW YORK WAS IN NOUAKCHOTT TO DISCUSS FINANCING OF MAJOR NEW MINERALS PROJECT WITH DIRECTOR SNIM, AND THEN OBSERVED THAT DEEDS IMPRESS PRIVATE BUSINESSMEN AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

4. 'ABD RA-RAHMAAN CONCLUDED TWO-HOUR SESSION WAY HE HAD BEGUN IT;WITH STRONG RECOMMENDATION USG SEND ATHERTON TO NOUAKCHOTT. I COUNTERED WITH RENEWED EXPLANATION OF REASONS SUCH VISIT WAS NON-STARTER AT THIS POINT, SEQUENTED HE CONVEY THIS VIEW TO THE "OTHERS" WHEN HE MET THEM FOR TEA LATER IN AFTERNOON, AND SUGGESTED HE ALSO PASS ALONG THE GIST OF OUR DISCUSSION ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING.HANDYSIDE

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